

## Residential Yard Cleanup - What's Going On?

An Update From the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

By Mark Walker, Voluntary Cleanup Program Coordinator

The purpose of today's article is to provide information on the residential yard cleanup that has been ongoing in Rico since 2004. Stay tuned to this section for monthly updates on the status of the cleanup. This cleanup is under the oversight of the state of Colorado's Voluntary Cleanup Program, with the cleanup work done by contractors of ARCO. I personally have been involved with cleanup of mining waste in Rico since 1995 when the Argentine, Columbia, Silver Swan and Santa Cruz cleanups were done.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment oversees the cleanup. Earlier, Rico stood up and spoke with one voice and said that residents did not want their town to become a Superfund site. EPA has stepped aside, and due partly to the success of the earlier cleanups, has allowed this latest work to proceed under the state program. In my oversight position I am in Rico about every other week checking on the progress of the cleanup. Sooooo, where are we now and where have we been?

ARCO has completed removal of contaminated soils from approximately 40 residential yards with the highest levels of contamination. Additionally, a repository capable of holding all the soil from the yards was constructed near the St Louis Tunnel. This work was done in late 2004 and Summer of 2005. The results are in and at this point it is obvious that some yards returned to their pre-construction splendor better than others. Those yards that received sod are generally looking pretty good while those seeded with native species are, shall we say, somewhat "green-challenged." In discussions with ARCO's

on site representative, Chris Sanchez, soil samples sent to CSU and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) indicated that the soil is suitable as a growth medium. The problem with germination appears to be due to a seed application rate that was not robust enough. Fixing the germination issue is the responsibility of last year's contractor and is probably being addressed as you are reading these very words. As an aside, congratulations go out to Jennifer Stark who accomplished the highest rate of germination in the "Native Species Yard Bowl".

In 2006, ARCO also has plans to remediate approximately 30-35 residential yards which exceed the Rico cleanup number. "What?" you say! You were not aware there is a Rico Cleanup Number? Late this spring after review of the Risk Assessment by the state health department, it was determined that yards in excess of 1100 ppm lead should be cleaned up. ARCO will be contacting all property owners of houses with yards that exceed this number to arrange the cleanup. There is a new contractor in town this year; you may have already seen the Envirocon trucks. Please welcome Envirocon and lend a hand in helping them adjust to the altitude.

Thank you for all your patience in putting up with the dust, inconvenience and the backup beepers. There is a limited time to accomplish the cleanup so please participate if you are contacted and keep Rico off the Superfund list. If you see me walking around town (I'm the balding guy who is constantly adjusting to the altitude), please feel free to stop and ask any questions, or contact me toll free at 1 (888) 569-1831, extension 3449.

## Dolores County Election Results

|                          | Rico | County total |
|--------------------------|------|--------------|
| US Congress District 3   |      |              |
| John Salazar (D)         | 11   | 215          |
| Scott Tipton (R)         | 3    | 208          |
| Governor                 |      |              |
| Bill Ritter (D)          | 11   | 178          |
| Bob Beauprez (R)         | 3    | 196          |
| Secretary of State       |      |              |
| Ken Gordon (D)           | 11   | 163          |
| Mike Coffman (R)         | 3    | 192          |
| State Treasurer          |      |              |
| Cary Kennedy (D)         | 11   | 160          |
| Mark Hillman (R)         | 3    | 181          |
| Attorney General         |      |              |
| Fern O'Brien (D)         | 11   | 154          |
| John Suthers (R)         | 3    | 179          |
| CU Regent at large       |      |              |
| Stephen Ludwig (D)       | 11   | 151          |
| Brian Davidson (R)       | 2    | 166          |
| CU Regent District 3     |      |              |
| Susan Hakanson (D)       | 11   | 151          |
| Tilman Bishop (R)        | 3    | 170          |
| State Senate District 6  |      |              |
| James Isgar (D)          | 11   | 202          |
| Ron Tate (R)             | 2    | 197          |
| State Representative #58 |      |              |
| Brian Ahern (D)          | 11   | 143          |
| Ray Rose (R)             | 3    | 189          |
| County Commissioner      |      |              |
| Cliff Bankston (D)       | 7    | 197          |
| Julie Kibel (R)          | 2    | 211          |
| County Clerk & Recorder  |      |              |
| Rebecca Daves Norris (D) | 8    | 84           |
| Brenda Funk (D)          | 3    | 216          |
| LaRita Randolph (R)      | 1    | 185          |
| Nita Purkat (R)          | 2    | 107          |
| County Treasurer         |      |              |
| Janie Stiasny (D)        | 11   | 253          |
| County Assessor          |      |              |
| Berna Ernst (D)          | 9    | 195          |
| Christy Vinger (R)       | 0    | 188          |
| Francie Gardner (R)      | 3    | 100          |
| County Sheriff           |      |              |
| Jerry Martin (D)         | 9    | 225          |
| Tom Halper (R)           | 4    | 176          |
| County Coroner           |      |              |
| Joyce Barnett (D)        | 9    | 219          |
| Thomas Myers (D)         | 2    | 89           |

## Weeds Beware: the Bugs are Back in Town

Rico has some new residents, about 20,000. You haven't noticed? Well, they're a little hard to see. And they can only be observed while feasting on yellow toad flax, also known as butter and eggs.

The Town of Rico, along with the Rico Alpine Society, recently introduced the *Mecinus janthinus*, weevils whose habitat is specific to the all-too-common butter and eggs, at various locations throughout town. The critters were purchased through grant funding in cooperation with the San Juan Mountain Association, the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, the San Juan National Forest, the Town of Rico and Dolores County to help combat this escaped ornamental - turned invasive weed.

Yellow toadflax has both deep and horizontal rootstock and can reproduce from both

seed and root pieces which make it difficult to eradicate by extraction. It often grows in colonies, choking out native plant species in competition over water. One plant can produce 70 to 80 sprouts in its first year, and twice that number in its second year, thus multiplying exponentially.

Yellow toadflax originated in Europe, was brought over to the States in the 1600s as an ornamental flower and is still being sold through nurseries and catalogs. These escapees can even be found in a few local garden plots. Thus, in addition to getting rid of our current population, the Town and the Rico Alpine Society are trying to educate the community about these and other potentially threatening ornamentals. Volunteers have planted a demonstration garden on the south side of the Rico Elementary School which exhibits how

native plants can be used in ornamental settings in lieu of non-native ornamentals like yellow toadflax and oxeye daisy, which threaten the very existence of more delicate indigenous flowering plants in our region.

Other insect species have been released to control weeds in Rico before, but most did not survive the harsh Rico winter. If *Mecinus janthinus* can survive this winter, it could take between three and five years to notice a substantial difference, but it could be a safe viable alternative to chemical herbicide applications.

To learn more about noxious weeds and how you can do your part to prevent their spread, contact a Rico Alpine Society board member: Deanna Belch, Gary Gass, Judy Schaefer or Mike Curran.

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